

**RECORD OF DECISION**  
**for the**  
**UNITED STATES AIR FORCE**  
**F-22 FORCE DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION AND WEAPONS SCHOOL BEDDOWN,**  
**NELLIS AFB, NEVADA**

A Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was prepared to aid in determining whether or not to beddown F-22 aircraft at Nellis AFB for the F-22 Force Development Evaluation (FDE) program and Weapons School (WS). The beddown includes the following component actions:

- Basing 17 F-22 aircraft at Nellis AFB in three phases occurring in fiscal years (October through September) 2002 (6 aircraft), 2003 (2 aircraft), and 2008 (9 aircraft);
- Implementing the F-22 FDE program at the base in 2002 and the WS in 2008;
- Constructing or externally modifying eight on-base facilities and internally modifying two facilities to support the F-22 programs;
- Adding 367 personnel at Nellis AFB;
- Conducting an additional 4,472 annual sorties from Nellis AFB by 2008, of which 4,300 would use the Nellis Range Complex (NRC) and 172 would occur at remote ranges; and
- Testing ordnance delivery on approved targets and releasing chaff and flares in approved airspace.

The Air Force would fulfill essential elements of its testing and training program for the F-22 by implementing the beddown at Nellis AFB. The F-22 is the Air Force's next-generation fighter and is designed to meet combat requirements well into the future. The F-22 possesses stealth technology, state-of-the-art radar and electronics, sophisticated weapon systems, and the capability to fly supersonic while minimizing fuel use. These characteristics make the F-22 a formidable deterrent to potential adversaries, enabling the United States to maintain and extend its combat superiority throughout the world.

For all new aircraft, like the F-22, the Air Force is required by law and policy to develop the aircraft's war combat capabilities. This includes testing and retesting aircraft systems, developing and refining the tactics and maneuvers it can perform, and training initial aircrews to fly the F-22 under combat conditions. This essential war-combat capability program is implemented under the FDE program, and it also includes interrelated WS activities. FDE program and WS are interrelated yet separate and will exist for the life of the F-22 in the Air Force inventory. They

are essential programs ensuring the F-22 is being effectively used by its pilots in training and in combat.

To provide for successful F-22 FDE program and WS development activities, the Air Force proposes to beddown this aircraft at Nellis AFB. This Air Force base and its associated airspace and range complex are the only Air Force sites truly capable of providing the specific and unique requirements needed for the F-22 FDE program and WS, without major changes to airspace, land resources, and base infrastructure.

### **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Air Force Instruction 32-7061 and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require an early and open process for identifying significant issues related to a proposed action and obtaining input from the public prior to making a decision that could significantly affect the environment. These regulations specify public involvement at various junctures in the development of an EIS, including public scoping prior to the preparation of a Draft EIS, and public review of the Draft EIS prior to preparing and publishing the Final EIS. A decision is made only after completion of the Final EIS and after a 30-day waiting period.

Prior to the publication of the Draft EIS, the public process included publishing the Notice Of Intent in the *Federal Register* on August 11, 1997. After public notification in newspapers and radio stations, three scoping meetings were held August 26 through August 28 at the following southern Nevada locations: Tonopah, Las Vegas, and Caliente. A total of 22 people attended the meetings and provided comments. Of these 22, seven people provided oral input. By the end of the scoping period, September 30, 1997, 13 written comments had been received. These scoping comments were used to guide preparation of the Draft EIS.

Following these scoping meetings, the Air Force prepared the Draft EIS and made it available to the public and agencies for review and comment. Official public notification commenced with the publication of the Notice of Availability on June 18, 1999 in the *Federal Register* and local newspapers in the affected area. Over 340 copies were set to federal, state, and local agencies, Native American organizations, special interest groups, and citizens. The document was sent to those in the public who requested a copy and was made available at selected public facilities such as libraries and local government agencies within southern Nevada. The public reviews and comment period for the Draft EIS lasted 45 days. During this time, hearings were held to provide an opportunity for the public to evaluate the proposal and the analysis contained within the Draft EIS. Public hearings were held in three Nevada communities potentially affected by the Proposed Action: Las Vegas, Caliente, and Tonopah from July 13 to July 15, 1999. The public was notified of the hearings through newspaper advertisements placed in local newspapers in the affected area. Twenty-nine people attended the three hearings with nine people providing oral testimony and three comment sheets submitted. The Air Force received an additional 10 written

comments during the public comment process. The closing date of the 45-day comment period was August 2, 1999.

Comments received during the public review and comment period were considered in the preparation of the Final EIS. Modifications were made to the Final EIS based upon the input received during the public review and comment period for the Draft EIS to provide clarification of the proposed action, impact assessment, and management actions to reduce environmental effects.

### **ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED IN THE EIS**

The EIS analyzed two alternatives, the Proposed Action and No-Action. The beddown (Proposed Action) will allow for the development, testing, and teaching of the combat capabilities the F-22 would use in war. The Proposed Action would comply with Federal law, as well as Department of Defense and Air Force policy, which require the Air Force to conduct FDE testing of the F-22 aircraft and provide WS training for F-22 pilots. Nellis AFB and the associated Nellis Range Complex were found to represent the only location determined as reasonable to fulfill the purpose and need for the action. Beddown of F-22 aircraft at Nellis AFB and use of the unique assets offered by the Nellis Range Complex for testing and training meet the operational requirements of both the FDE program and WS. Nellis AFB and the Nellis Range Complex provide the military airspace, secure training ranges, range instrumentation and simulated threats, professional expertise, and infrastructure needed to implement the FDE program and WS for the F-22. The Proposed Action was the Air Force's preferred alternative.

Under the No-Action Alternative, no F-22 beddown would occur at Nellis AFB, no on-base construction or personnel increases associated with the F-22 would be implemented, and the FDE program and WS for the F-22 would not use the Nellis Range Complex. This was the environmentally preferred alternative.

### **DECISION**

After considering the potential environmental consequences of the Proposed Action and No-Action Alternative, as well as other factors relative to national defense, the Air Force has decided to select the Proposed Action to beddown F-22 aircraft at Nellis AFB for the FDE program and WS.

### **IMPACTS**

Analysis in this EIS established that the proposed F-22 beddown would result in either negligible effects or would not change current environmental conditions at Nellis AFB or in the NRC (Table ES-1) for airspace management, safety, land use, air quality, hazardous materials and waste, earth and water resources, biological resources, cultural resources, transportation, and recreation and

visual resources. The F-22 beddown would result in increased aircraft noise around Nellis AFB. This would disproportionately affect minority and low-income populations in the area near the base.

Construction would be minor and confined to Nellis AFB. All construction would occur within previously disturbed areas without important plant and wildlife habitat. These locations are flat and away from drainages, so erosion of soils and sedimentation would be negligible. With the exception of the location of the planned Munitions Storage Facility, all areas slated for construction have been surveyed for cultural resources and none contain resources eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. For the Munitions Storage Facility, Nellis AFB will conduct a cultural resources survey prior to the start of construction activities. Should resources deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places be found, Nellis AFB will either avoid them or mitigate effects to insignificant levels through data recovery.

Emission of air pollutants into the area around Nellis AFB would increase under the Proposed Action but would not significantly impact local air quality. Potential sources of emissions at Nellis AFB would include facility construction, maintenance activities, refueling, private and government vehicle travel, and aircraft operations. These increased emissions would remain below *de minimis* levels and would not result in or contribute to exceedences of federal air quality standards. Since these quantities are below *de minimis* and are not regionally significant, no conformity determination is required.

Proposed additional personnel for the F-22 would represent less than 5 percent of total base personnel. With the number of major exercises that occur at Nellis AFB each year, variation in base population is common. The proposed personnel increase would have negligible effects on land use, water use, transportation networks, and the local economy. The F-22 beddown would increase the total number of aircraft at the base, but this total would still be less than the base has accommodated in the past. For this reason, Nellis AFB has sufficient programs and procedures already established to handle environmental effects associated with the proposed beddown without potential degradation to the environment. Hazardous waste and materials management procedures already established for other similar aircraft would continue to be followed. If new materials or wastes were generated, then Air Force procedures would be established to contain and properly dispose of them.

The proposed beddown would increase noise above baseline conditions around Nellis AFB but would remain within historical levels and would not adversely impact land use. This determination was made by comparing the historical day-night noise level (DNL) range of 65 decibels (dB) or greater on land surrounding Nellis AFB. Many years worth of data was used to identify the long-term noise dynamics as identified in the following Air Installation Compatibility Use Zone (AICUZ) documents: the 1981 AICUZ report with 21,379 acres impacted; 1992 AICUZ report (Clark County zones) with 15,633 acres impacted; and 1997 AICUZ study

(Baseline) with 14,514 acres impacted. Clark County used the 1992 AICUZ report to establish the zoning ordinances currently in use around Nellis AFB (referred to as Clark County noise zones). The 1997 AICUZ study identified current conditions and was used as the baseline for the noise analysis. The data identify that the noise contours surrounding Nellis have a highly dynamic and cyclical history. Over just the past 20 years, the contours have shrunk in total size and have shifted to the northeast side of the base over open, public land. This change reduced the impacts to residential, commercial, and industrial lands to the south and west of the base. Baseline noise contours show that current aircraft noise impacting the south and west sides of the base is well below historical levels and within the Clark County noise zones.

The proposed action would increase the amount of land affected by DNL noise of 65 dB or greater by 8,700 acres (approximately 23,000 acres total). This increase would occur predominantly to the northeast of the base. Noise on the south and west sides of the base would increase approximately 2 dB or less at any location and would remain consistent with Clark County noise zones for all except approximately 900 acres of residential land. Looking at the historical trends mentioned above, this land has experienced DNL noise exceeding 65 dB as recently as the 1980's. Changes in the Clark County noise zones in the 1990's excluded this area from the DNL 65 dB contours. The proposed action would increase noise on this land by less than 2 dB for a total projected DNL noise level of 65 dB. These changes would be within the long-term noise cycle impacting the area.

The proposed action would increase the number of people affected by DNL noise of 65 dB or greater around Nellis AFB. Approximately 45,000 people currently live within the Clark County DNL noise zones of 65 dB or greater in the area. Under the proposed action, four-fifths of these people, approximately 36,000, would actually experience DNL noise of 65 dB or greater (as compared to two thirds impacted under baseline conditions, or approximately 31,000 people). About 1,000 people outside the Clark County noise zones would also experience increased noise due to the proposed action. These people live on the land outside the Clark County DNL 65 dB noise contours described above. Under the proposed action, they would be exposed to less than a 2 dB increase in noise.

The increase in noise around Nellis AFB associated with the Proposed Action would disproportionately affect minority and low income populations. To determine what is disproportionate, the analysis must compare the percentage of minority and low-income populations in the impacted area to the percentage of these populations in the entire Region of Comparison (ROC). The minority population in the ROC, Clark County, is 25 percent and the low-income population is 11 percent. Approximately 11,000 people from the affected population described above, or 30 percent, are minorities and approximately 6,000, or 16 percent, are low income. It is reasonable to assume the distribution of minority and low-income populations remains similar throughout the affected area, about 300 minorities and 160 low income people

would be part of the 1000 people outside the Clark County noise zones but impacted by DNL noise of 65 dB from the proposed action.

In the NRC, the F-22s would fly approximately 25,800 annual sortie-operations representing 13 to 9 percent of the 200,000 to 300,000 sortie-operations that now occur annually. The F-22 would not use the NRC in substantively different ways than it is used now or has been used in the past. This use would negligibly affect environmental conditions in the NRC.

During air combat maneuvering, the F-22 is estimated to fly supersonic approximately 10 percent of the time. All supersonic activity by the F-22 would occur within NRC airspace and at altitudes authorized for supersonic flight. Sonic boom levels and frequency of occurrence would be slightly higher than baseline conditions. Coyote and Elgin would experience the largest change, with a CDNL (lower frequency band weighted day-night level) 1 to 3 dB increase and 4 to 6 additional sonic booms per month. All other supersonic-authorized airspace would be subject to increases of CDNL 1 dB or less and less than 1 sonic boom per month.

The F-22 would deliver ordnance only on existing, previously disturbed targets. No new areas would be affected. The F-22 would also use defensive countermeasures, known as chaff and flares, but only in areas already subject to and approved for their use. Overall, the activities proposed for the F-22 at the NRC would be consistent with current activities and would not significantly affect the environment. There would be no significant cumulative impacts from the interaction of the F-22 beddown with other reasonably foreseeable actions.

#### **MANAGEMENT ACTIONS TO REDUCE THE POTENTIAL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

Reduction of the potential for environmental impacts represents an important part of NEPA. Nellis AFB conducts several ongoing efforts designed to achieve reductions in the effect the base has on the community and to work with groups or members of the community to address issues. All of these efforts, as highlighted below, would continue to apply following the F-22 beddown. Nellis AFB also proposes to expand its community interaction program to provide more emphasis on informing and working with minority and low-income populations around the base. By continuing and potentially expanding these efforts, Nellis AFB would reduce the potential impacts associated with the F-22 beddown.

*NOISE ABATEMENT PROGRAM:* Nellis AFB's noise abatement program focuses on reducing noise over residential areas surrounding the base. By employing this program, Nellis AFB will continue to reduce noise effects on the general populations, as well as affected minority and low-income populations. Procedures used in the Noise Abatement Program include:

- ♦ Routing takeoffs to avoid residential areas as much as possible;
- ♦ Controlling and scheduling missions to reduce noise levels, especially at night or early in the morning;
- ♦ Altering the speed, rate of climb, and turning radius of aircraft to reduce overall time and time at low altitude over residential areas;
- ♦ Minimizing the use of afterburners for takeoff;
- ♦ Avoiding practice approaches early in the morning on weekends and holidays;
- ♦ Conducting aircraft engine run-ups in a portion of the airfield designed to minimize the exposure of surrounding residential areas to noise; and
- ♦ Minimizing late-night engine run-ups.

All of these procedures have served to reduce noise and its effects on the population near Nellis AFB. The Air Force also will continue to evaluate the noise generated by the F-22. Should further feasible noise abatement procedures be identified at the time of the beddown, the Air Force would assess and potentially implement them.

*AIR INSTALLATION COMPATIBILITY USE ZONE PROGRAM:* The Air Compatibility Use Zone Program is an ongoing program for all Air Force airfields. It is designed to assist the adjacent community by recommending land use planning that ensures safe aircraft operations and minimizes noise impacts to the community. Elements of the AICUZ program include:

- ♦ Maintaining a cooperative, open dialogue between the base and the community for land use planning;
- ♦ Offering assistance to the community in planning for changes in aircraft operations and noise; and
- ♦ Developing noise contours around the base that can be used by the community for zoning ordinances.

Nellis AFB has conducted the AICUZ program for almost two decades. Nellis AFB continues to work with the Clark County Planning and Zoning Commission to recommend concepts for land use plans and zoning ordinances. Clark County has adopted many of those recommendations in order to reduce the potential for conflicts between aircraft operations at Nellis AFB and development in the nearby community.

*PROPOSED MINORITY AND LOW-INCOME COMMUNITY INTERACTION:* Nellis AFB has been a part of the Las Vegas metropolitan area community for more than 50 years. Like any major institution in a community, being a good neighbor is a top priority. At Nellis AFB, this has resulted in a public

outreach program through such events as air shows and restoration advisory board meetings. To augment specific outreach efforts, Nellis AFB proposes to expand its community interaction program to provide more emphasis on the minority and low-income populations around the base. This effort would aid these segments of the community in understanding the function and importance of Nellis AFB, as well as provide a focused opportunity for minority and low-income populations to work with the base on issues concerning them. Noise from aircraft operations, including those by F-22s, would likely be a principal topic of the program.

*NATIVE AMERICAN INTERACTION PROGRAM:* Nellis AFB has a comprehensive Native American Interaction Program and conducts substantial government-to-government relations with Native Americans affected by activities at the base and in the NRC. This ongoing interaction program addressed the F-22 proposal and EIS through:

- ♦ Direct notification of the initiation of the EIS process to 17 tribes and one organization with historic or prehistoric ties to the land in the NRC vicinity.
- ♦ Communication to insure that the 17 tribes and one organization were invited to scoping meetings.
- ♦ Direct distribution of copies of the draft EIS to the tribes to insure their awareness of the proposal and its potential effects, and to receive comments from them.
- ♦ Meeting and discussion with the tribes after receipt of comments on the draft EIS and briefing of status and schedule of the F-22 NEPA process and F-22 program.

Nellis AFB's Native American Interaction Program and associated government-to-government relations would continue should the F-22 beddown occur. Any future issues from the Native Americans regarding the F-22 would be addressed through this program.

*CULTURAL RESOURCES:* As described in the Draft EIS, the proposed site for the Munitions Storage Facility has not been surveyed for cultural resources. To comply with regulatory requirements for the protection of cultural resources, Nellis AFB would undertake the following management actions to reduce potential effects:

- Survey of the construction area prior to ground disturbance (before January 2000);
- Evaluate any cultural resources identified as a result of the survey;
- Enter into Section 106 consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO); and



- If cultural resources deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places are identified, either avoid them or mitigate the effects to insignificant levels through data recovery.

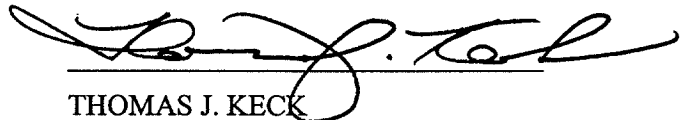
### SUMMARY

The EIS used public involvement to identify impacts and assess the environmental consequences associated with the F-22 FDE and WS beddown at Nellis AFB. Measures currently implemented to minimize the noise impacts around Nellis AFB will be applied to F-22 operations. The Air Force is taking all practicable means to avoid or minimize harm from the selected alternative. Should additional prudent measures become available, the Air Force will implement to the maximum extent possible, commensurate with cost, mission capability, and flight safety.

The Air Force is committed to being a good neighbor and will continue to work with the Clark County Planning and Zoning Commission to evaluate land use recommendations around Nellis AFB. This coordination will aid in the reduction of noise impacts on the surrounding community.

20 DEC 99

Date



THOMAS J. KECK  
Lieutenant General, USAF  
Vice Commander, Air Combat Command